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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the work of day care directors in terms of four functions. The first function is that of assuming legal responsibility and accountability. This function includes accepting punishment in case of wrongdoing; representing the organization to the government and the public; and meeting state licensure standards and other standards. The fulfillment of this function depends on the type of day care organization. Private agencies may be either for-profit or not-for-profit, and may involve self-employed persons, proprietorships, partnerships, or corporations. For-profit corporations may take the form of a franchise, chain, or turnkey corporation. The second function of a day care administrator is that of "making policy happen." The administrator must ensure that there is a process for establishing and reexamining policy. This function is dependent on the center's organizational or bureaucratic structure and its style of decision making. The third function is that of maintaining the center's survival. This function involves conforming to environmental and legal guidelines, and cultivating sources of funding. The fourth function is that of taking care of staff. The administrator must attend to staff's financial, safety, and social needs. (BC)

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WHAT DOES A DAY CARE DIRECTOR REALLY DO?

by Gwen G. Morgan

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For two years I have been teaching an intensive, high-level course to which day care administrators come from different parts of the country to share information and ideas. Over the same period of time I have also been teaching courses for day care staff. I am struck by the discrepancies in the perception of the role of an administrator by the two groups. The day care administrators find the role so complex and difficult that it makes them doubt at times that it can be done at all. Staff, on the other hand, cannot define any set of tasks which they think administrators do; they doubt at times that their administrators have anything to do.

An English writer put it this way:

> "As everybody knows, an executive has practically nothing to do -- that is, nothing to do except: to decide what is to be done; to tell somebody to do it; to listen to reasons why it should not be done, or why it should be done in a different way; to follow up to see if the thing has been done; to inquire why it has not been done; to follow up a second time; to discover that it has been done, but done incorrectly; to conclude that as long as it has been done, it may as well be left as it is; to consider how much simpler and better it would have been if he had done it himself in the first place, but to realize that such an idea would strike at the very foundation of the belief of all employees that an executive has nothing to do."

If staff have an image of the day care administrator as a superfluous person filling no important defined function in the organization, day care administrators themselves are often unclear about their role. They find themselves in a unique never-never land where they are neither Board, staff, nor parents. Commonly, they feel isolated in their tasks, since theirs is a function that no one else in the organization fills, nor has anyone else in the organization usually ever filled that role. There is little opportunity to talk about their problems with anyone else in the same organization.

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Yet they must be doing something of importance, because studies have indicated that an important key to quality of child care is the nature of the administration of a program. Both the Abt studies, and those by Elizabeth Prescott at Pacific Oaks College, indicate that there may be a direct link between the quality of the care the children receive and the nature of the administration of the program.

Quality of administration may be more important than the often-argued issues of child-staff ratio staff "professionalism," and type of auspices. Therefore, it seems important to analyze the job, and begin to develop the skills and knowledge which contribute to doing it well. Yet no one has even made a start on defining what would constitute the elements of administrator "professionalism." When the topic is dealt with at all, the assumption is that "professionalism" for an administrator is identical with "professionalism" for a head teacher. I would seriously question this view.

It would be useful if the day care world would begin to analyze the tasks of a day care administrator, the skills and knowledge and personality traits essential for doing the work, and which of those could be built into a training process. As a first stab at the process, I would identify four different sets of general tasks for day care administrators: (1) Assuming legal responsibility and accountability; (2) Making policy happen; (3) Keeping the center alive; and (4) Taking care of everybody.

The first general area, assuming legal responsibility and accountability, means being the one who goes to jail if anything wrong is being done, being the one with enough voice to speak for the organization so that the government can legally negotiate in the public interest in such matters as funding, licensing, and other legal responsibilities of the organization to the public. For centuries the law has sought to identify a responsible <u>person</u> with whom to deal, when a group of individuals have created an organization. Sometimes several people can be legally defined as a person, but when that happens they must be able to speak with one voice. Government must be able to identify the person to be held accountable, and get one answer when it asks a question. There is no way in which the law or the government can relate to an organization if different individuals speak for the organization and are free to say different things. Therefore, the administrator, in the form of an individual or a group of individuals, assumes that legal role -- the one person who has the right and the obligation to negotiate for the organization with the public interest, represented by various agencies of various parts of different levels of government.

In this accountable role, the administrator is responsible for meeting and continuing to meet state standards for licensure. He or she is responsible also for funding standards, for assuring that ineligible persons do not receive public funds, for prudent handling of the funds, for payment of all taxes and insurance and keeping withholding taxes apart from operating funds, and for meeting Fair Employment Practices, OSHA, Affirmative Action Plans under Civil Rights Requirements, and all other standards and requirements for health, safety, transportation, fairness, and fiscal accountability.

For all of this, the administrator is acting as an agent of a Board if there is a Board, and the responsibility is shared with that Board. If the Board directs the administrator to do something which is not legal, or fails to exert appropriate Board supervision, the Board may be liable. If the administrator acts outside the law without Board policy, the administrator may be liable.

There may not be a Board. Organizations take a number of legal forms. If there is a very small proprietorship or partnership, the owner is probably also the administrator and accepts the legal liability as a trade-off for effectiveness in not having to share authority for decisions. Larger organizations employ an administrator to act as an agent of the owners or an agent of the Board. The following are the legal forms of organization which day care might take.

Classification of Types of Organization

To begin with, organizations fall into two major types: public or private.

A **public agency** is an organization which is an arm of government. This acting as an arm of government can take place at either the federal, state, county, or local level. In a public agency, employees are public employees built into the public budget and financed with tax revenues.

Examples of public agencies are: public schools, day care programs operated by welfare departments, day care programs operated by housing authorities, state hospitals, etc.

In contrast to public agencies, the other major category is that of **private agency**, which has many subcategories. A private agency is an organization or a service which is not a part of government. Private agencies may receive public funds, either by grant or by contract or by individual purchase of service, but the agency itself is not a built-in part of the government at any level.

An example of an organization which is almost fully funded, but which is a private agency, is Head Start. The once-important distinction between public and private agencies is becoming blurred since, in the last ten years, we have seen major government funding bringing with it total control of policy and guidelines.

An example of a private agency which is only partially receiving government funds would be a charitable voluntary day care center which has a contract for a percentage of its children to be government-funded -- say, 50% -- while the other half of the children served are financed through parent fees and private gifts. Examples of private agencies with little or no public funds would be small suburban nursery schools, Mom and Pop day care centers.

Within the broad category of private agencies, there are two legal classifications: for-profit or not-for-profit. Both these types of organizations may take in more monies than they expend, although of course this is rare in day care. Both these kinds of organizations may also take in less monies than they expend. The difference between taking in and paying out money does not distinguish between for-profit and not-for-profit organizations. The distinction lies in what may be done with the surplus of funds taken in over expenditures.

There are three ways in which such surplus of incoming funds over expended funds could be used:

(1) held as a cash reserve so that the organization can meet its payroll obligations and other obligations without running out of money.

(2) to purchase equipment and supplies for growth of the organization.

(3) to reward investors, owners, etc., who have invested capital in the organization by draining off part of the funds as dividends, etc.

The difference between profit-making and non-profit organizations lies primarily with the third way of using funds, since non-profit agencies must spend their monies only in the first two categories, and may not make payments to investors or owners. There are many profit-making organizations which never spend funds in the third category, however.

Profit and non-profit organizations may both spend their surplus funds, which both have difficulty in creating, in the first two categories, although there may be a difference in philosophy between the two. Where there is a difference, it is

likely to lie in the fact that the non-profit agency may place high priority on using all its resources in the present, being sure it is maximizing the service it provides to each individual child, here and now, as a philosophical principle. The profit-making organization may be more future-oriented, concerned that some of its funds be used to assure stability and growth of the organization.

There is a difficulty at present in understanding and trust between the two kinds of organization. Profit-making organizations view the non-profits as opportunistic, seeking public funds to serve children in ways which benefit the adults in the organization without regard for the families which need child care but are not eligible for public funds, and without regard for future stability. Non-profit organizations view the profit-makers as opportunistic, more concerned for future organizational strength than for present quality for children now in the programs. Both groups can make a good case against the other, although the polarization undermines the support for day care in general.

As far as quality is concerned, there appears to be a correlation between poor or mediocre child care and the degree to which the program is reliant on parent fees. Programs which do not have resources beyond parent fees, whether they are church-run programs or profit chains, are marginal operations and appear to have all the cost-shaving characteristics of small marginal operations. Programs which are less marginal in their budgeting appear to achieve higher quality.

Private agencies, in contrast to public agencies, have the following forms:

Self-employed Person. Most independent family day care would be given this classification. It is legally classified as for profit.

Proprietorship. When organizations involve more than one person, they may choose this legal form, with one individual taking full responsibility and full liability for all action taken. This type of organization is legally classified as for-profit, even though its owners typically earn far less than the salaries paid to directors of non-profit organizations. Examples are small day care centers, and small nursery schools, which are not incorporated.

Partnership. This type of organization is very similar to a proprietorship in every way, except that responsibility and liability are equally shared among two or more partners. A "limited partnership" may include some partners whose responsibility and liability is less than that of the full partners.

Corporation. This type of organization was a legal invention to protect one individual or several partners from full personal liability by the creation of a decision-making and accountable Board of Directors, who are responsible for the organization under state laws covering incorporation. Corporations may be created in two forms, which are very similar to one another.

1. Not-for-profit corporation. This is the only form of organization legally classified as not for profit, even though many other forms of organization, especially in day care, do not necessarily make money. A Board of Directors assures that the organization carries out its stated purpose.

2. For-profit corporation. This form of organization is very similar to the non-profit corporation, and has little in common with the proprietorship. A Board of Directors assures that the organization fulfills its stated purpose. Funds received may be distributed to those who have invested in the organization.

   If a for profit organization is responsible for more than one center, it may use one of the following organizational arrangements:

   a. **Franchise.** The central organization allows an individual at each center to use its name and follow its standardized program, its administrative procedures, and its design of facilities in exchange for an agreed-upon sum of money. Any income above that sum goes to the franchise.

   b. **Chain.** Administration of each separate service center is by employees of the central administration.

   c. **Turnkey.** The central organization starts up a new service, employing its own staff and consultants for a start-up period, after which time the new service spins off either as a new corporation, profit-making or non-profit, or as part of an existing organization, non-profit or for-profit.

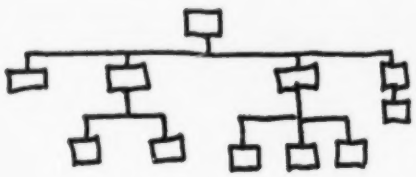
Although the distinction between public and private agencies is more important than the distinction between for-profit and not-profit, the above definitions may be broken down between profit and non-profit, for purposes of discussion, as follows:

Not for profit.	The non-profit corporation. There is not any other form of non-profit organization.
For profit.	Self-employed individual. Proprietorship. Partnership Full Limited For profit corporation Franchise Chain Turnkey

The second function of a day care administrator is **making policy happen.** Note that this is not the same as making policy. The participants in policy-making may vary, but the common role for day care administrators, regardless of form of organization or cast of characters, is to be sure there is a process for establishing and re-examining policy, so that the organization has a sense of mission, rather than operating out of drift.

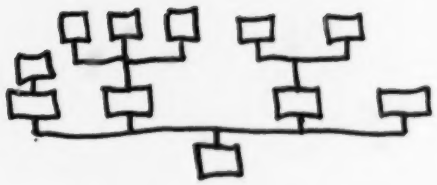
For an understanding of this second function, it is important to understand that organizational structure and style are not the same as the legal forms of organization. Organizational structure is not the same as organizational style, either.

Aside from the differences in legal forms, an organization may take a number of organizational forms by internal decision. Some of the forms which organizations take might be represented as follows:



Bureaucratic

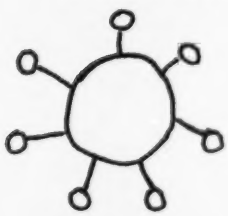
A so-called bureaucratic organization might just as easily be represented this way:



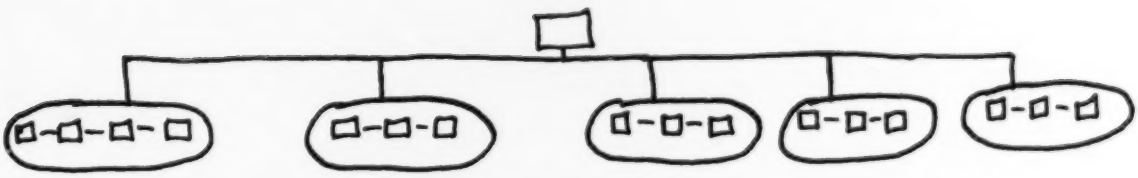
Bureaucratic

Other forms:

Collective



Charismatic



Beads on a string

There are not a wide variety of organizational structures among which to choose. Any one of the above structures can operate in a highly democratic way or a highly autocratic and despotic way, depending on the style and values and established norms of the individuals involved, and the method of decision-making which is being used in the organization. If one is interested in the assessment of the degree of democracy of an organization, structure is far less important to evaluate than style.

The different ways in which groups make decisions as identified by Edgar Schein are the following:

plop
one-person decision
decision by minority
majority vote
consensus

No one style of decision-making is appropriate for every decision. According to findings by Roger Neugebauer in a study of day care organizations, those centers which sometimes, or usually, engage in decisions by consensus also rate very high on a number of other factors such as staff satisfaction. Those who use less democratic methods of decision-making as a general practice rate lower.

The issue of decision-making is relevant to the second function in general of day care administration: **making policy happen.** Regardless of organizational legal form or structure, the organization's administration has this key function. Note that it is not making policy. How policy is made and what individuals and groups participate in the process varies broadly but, however it is made, the administrator has a key role in making sure it is translated into present or future action. An organization needs to have a central mission and to operate consistently within its own sense of what its purpose is. Unless someone is responsible for making this happen, you find organizations which simply drift and/or react, organizations in which those who work do not share in or have a commitment to the goals of the organization, and very often practices that are counterproductive to the reasons why the organization was established.

The administrator needs to be responsible for ensuring that there is a process for the establishment of policy; to pinpoint areas where there is no clear policy and get the organization to make a commitment on the issue; to raise, through planning and evaluation, a re-examination of goals and improvement in the actions taken to achieve the goals.

The administrator is standing on a busy intersection of two contrasting processes. Information comes into the organization from the environment, and especially from the immediate consumers of the service, the parents, to the staff, from staff to the administrator and from administrator to board, in a process like this:

Community----Parents----Staff----Administrator----Board

At the same time, policy decisions may go entirely in the other direction:

Community----Board----Administrator----Staff----Parents

It is unlikely that an administrator will succeed if the Board puts him or her in the position of trying to make sure all the traffic flows in the second direction. Important information on which decisions will need to be based is flowing through parents to staff. Whether the Board likes it or not, this information will affect decisions in important ways. The administrator fills an extremely key and extremely difficult position in making sure information and communication flow well in both directions.

The third function of the day care administrator, again shared in theory with the Board if the organization is incorporated, either non-profit or for-profit, is keeping the center or program alive -- **the survival function.** Although it is the legal responsibility of the Board, the administrator is the agent of the Board and often carries most of the burden.

The burden is a heavy one at the present time. Day care centers live on the brink of disaster. On the one hand are severe environmental restraints in the form of complex laws and guidelines to which the program must conform. On the other hand is a scarcity of adequate resources for meeting the expectations of society and the goals of the program. It is the administrator who must cultivate all sources of free and cut-rate help; must negotiate bank loans to meet payroll when the state payment is late; must keep abreast of complicated guidelines for funding and new potential funding; and must negotiate a fair rate with the government. Of necessity, unless major values are to be compromised, this often becomes an effort to change the restraints and resources, or a degree of political action. For day care to accept the system as it is means to compromise the goals of day care very seriously.

James Levine and other day care administrators have described the inherent conflict in trying to fill all the various functions of a day care administrator. After successfully negotiating a rate increase, and finally getting a bank loan to meet the payroll, the administrator returns in triumph to the center, only to hear from a staff member, "Where WERE you? I was counting on you to substitute while I talked to Mrs. X, and besides the toilets overflowed and the Health Inspector was here and says we will have to be closed down tomorrow if we don't get them repaired and cleaned up!"

The need of staff for steady support is the reason why the fourth function is very important: **taking care of everybody.** Probably the one major reason why quality of care for children is

interdependent with administration may be the fact that day care is a difficult and demanding responsibility for staff, and a supportive climate for them is basic to that magic one feels in day care programs of high quality.

In such programs, regardless of organizational structure, roles are clear and a collaborative style exists. Ancillary staff, such as education coordinators and social service staff, are supportive of other staff roles. A high degree of trust and mutual support is created. This requires particular skill from the administrator.

Staff needs differ. According to a number of psychologists, there is a hierarchy of human needs, ranging from the most basic need for survival to other needs which become demands only after more basic needs have been met. These are arranged schematically as follows:

A very interesting issue for day care is the fact that many people enter the field out of needs at the high end of the triangle: to create a better world, a sense of community with honest, open communication; to develop a relationship of trust within the day care community; to contribute to human understanding across distinctions of class and culture. But, on the other hand, since day care lives on a hand to mouth basis close to disaster, day care staff usually find that their basic needs for survival and safety are not met. The pay they receive is barely adequate to eat and pay their rent, and often cannot even stretch that far.

Traditionally in our time, the way to meet the survival and safety issues and some of the social ones has been to unionize and engage in collective bargaining. It is important that this is happening in day care. Yet collective bargaining, valuable and necessary as it is for achieving some human needs, must be based on adversary relationship. If that adversary relationship is with the day care administrator, it could seriously inhibit the higher goals of the day care staff for collaboration and trust. Collective bargaining is the wrong tool for achieving these higher human needs, but it is too important a tool for achieving the more basic needs, not yet achieved, to abandon in favor of other more collaborative modes. Unionization in day care must be sensitive to these issues, and sophisticated enough to identify the real enemies in the day care environment, political enough to put major energies into changing the restraints and the level of resources within which day care operates, and forward-looking enough not to undermine the collaborative goals of day care staff through inappropriate issues for collective bargaining.

Day care administrators, too, must be sophisticated enough to know when to welcome and work with unions, and when not to. When the union comes in and organizes staff, the Director's role will become very different. The Director should play no part in negotiations for a contract. Issues in that negotiation should be restricted to survival and safety, perhaps with a few social issues. If the union is sophisticated enough to leave the collaborative human needs out of the negotiating process, and the Director is sophisticated enough to let the Board and union work out the contract agreement, the Director can still play an important role in organizational issues involving the higher, more collaborative human needs.

The four functions of a day care administrator often compete against one another. Few administrators feel they have achieved the appropriate balance. Contrary to the view of the director's job held by many staff, it appears to call for the patience of Job, the wisdom of Solomon, the saintliness of St. Francis, ability to walk on water, and a bit of a way with loaves and fishes.